

'Blessing of the Boats'

You might be asking, what is a "Blessing of the Boats" ceremony? Simply, a "person of the cloth" prays for (blesses) the boats and crews for a safe and successful boating or fishing season.

Usually, Memorial Day Saturday morning is the best time to have a "Blessing," since Sundays most folks are in church. Check with a dock or marina operator. Many of the operators attend church and will be more than happy to accommodate the Blessing and even lend you some assistance. They normally are glad to have a Blessing at their location because it brings in customers. Find a real nice houseboat to conduct your ceremony on. This way, the small boats can gather around the houseboat or sit in slips, while the ceremony is being conducted atop the houseboat deck.

Now, you need the person to pray. This is the easiest by far, as all ministers love the opportunity to represent their faith and speak in front of an audience, especially since the "Blessing of the Boats" can and should generate coverage from the local media.

For possible speakers check with your lake manager, and representatives from the local state's fish and wildlife organization, Red Cross, Coast Guard Flotilla, U.S. Power Squadron, water safety council, and other water-related folks. Maybe the District Engineer might enjoy participating. Remember, to get on the DE's calendar in advance. The dock/marina operator might want to emcee the Blessing. If not, maybe the Corps' lake manager might be ideal.

Now it's time to advertise the event. A flyer/poster to put up around the lake, at the other marinas, is helpful to get the word out. Take the news release to the local newspaper just in case the reporter does not have time to interview you. If the newspaper has an outdoor editor or religious editor, these will be good places to start. Remember the local radio station or cable TV. A Blessing event is perfect for a remote broadcast. Check with your radio contact at least a month in advance. At a lake near a metropolitan area, the local television news or public affairs programs will work.

Don't forget the PA system. Those small

portable systems work really well for small gatherings.

If you are going to emcee the event, you will need a photographer for post coverage, just in case the local reporter does not show up. Think of the District newsletter and other media outlets. Your lake might need pictures for presentations, also.

Try your best to keep the speeches short. Boaters do not have patience for long, drawn out lectures.

You may get a complaint from other boat dock/marina operators saying, "Why did you have the 'Blessing of the Boats' down at So-'n--So's place?" This is a perfect time to lock on a facility for the next Memorial Day event. And, in post coverage you could add next year's location to the end of your news release, with photograph.

How much money will a "Blessing of the Boats" ceremony cost you? Very little. Just time.

Good luck with your "prayer meeting" on the water.